

WTO Ministerial chairman Finance Minister Kamal, and the people of Qatar for being model hosts and doing so much to achieve this successful outcome.

NOTE: The statement referred to WTO Director-General Mike Moore; and Finance Minister Youssef Hussein Kamal of Qatar.

Remarks on the Rescue of Humanitarian Aid Workers Imprisoned in Afghanistan and an Exchange With Reporters in Crawford
November 14, 2001

The President. Good evening. Today we've got incredibly good news. Our United States military rescued eight humanitarian workers who had been in prison in Afghanistan.

I'm really proud of our Armed Forces, and I'm also thankful for the folks in Afghanistan who helped with this rescue. There have been a lot of people praying for the eight—eight innocent folks. Particularly interesting for me, since I'm here in Crawford and the two Americans were from Waco. And I know a lot of the Waco citizens have been in deep prayer that they be rescued, and their prayers were answered.

I'm thankful they're safe. I am pleased with the way our military has conducted its operations, and I am glad to report to the American people this chapter of the Afghan theater has ended in a very positive and constructive way.

Q. Sir, did the rescuers encounter any resistance?

The President. You're going to have to talk to the Secretary of Defense about that.

Q. Were they rescued or turned over by the Taliban?

The President. Well, I think Secretary Rumsfeld will be making a statement. We're calling it a rescue. They have been helped by—I know the International Red Cross have been involved, and they were flown to safety by U.S. troops.

Q. Where are they now?

The President. In Pakistan.

Q. Sir, is it your understanding that this was an operation where our forces had to go in and extricate them?

The President. No, I don't think it was a mission of that—it was set up, as I understand it. In other words, there was—people on the ground were—facilitated the ability of our troops to move in and put them on a chopper and bring them to safety.

I have been—I had spent a lot of time worrying about all eight, particularly the two young ladies. I was worried that—about the reports that perhaps the enemy would put them in a house and then, for whatever reason, would encourage that house to get bombed. I was worried for their safety. We had thought of different ways in which we could extricate them from the prison they were in. And there were some people on the ground that helped, including the International Red Cross, and our military responded. And it's great—

Q. How soon will you be able to speak to them or see them, sir?

The President. I'm not sure. The good news is, they'll be home for Thanksgiving. And I would obviously—if they come back to the States or are in a position where I can call, I'd love to call them, and most of all, tell their parents that I can imagine how they feel, how thrilled they are that their daughters are safe.

Q. Other than the Red Cross, who else—

The President. I'm not sure yet, Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press]. I think

we had—Secretary Rumsfeld is going to brief here in a second.

Q. Was it a handover to U.S. troops or—

The President. I think it was a—I don't think it was—I think it was, as I understand it—and again, the Secretary of Defense will be briefing, the Defense Department will be briefing—that it was a facilitated rescue. In other words, there were people—and I say “rescued” because it's a very unstable part of the world still, obviously, and you never know what the Taliban is going to do. They, first and foremost, detained these people against their will and imprisoned them. And I was deeply concerned for their safety. But the really incredibly positive news is that, thanks to help on the ground and thanks to our U.S. military, they're now safe in Pakistan.

I've got to go to dinner with my guests. I've got my guests. You'll have to talk to the Secretary of Defense.

Operation Enduring Freedom

Q. Should the Taliban surrender now, sir?

The President. It's up to the Taliban to make that decision. But we're not going to end our mission until we accomplish the mission, and the mission is Al Qaida and terrorists and terrorist training camps.

One of the things I said in front of Congress was that one of the conditions were that these humanitarian aid workers be

turned over. That part of the mission is complete. We still want Al Qaida, and we want to make sure that Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for terrorist activity. That has yet to be accomplished.

In the meantime, we're making substantial gains on the ground. But this is—I told the American people, this could take a while. And I'm patient, and I am steady. And our military is—and our troops on the ground are on the hunt to accomplish the objective. And we will stay there until we do accomplish the objective.

Thank you all. I've got to go have dinner—

Visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin

Q. Are you going—

The President. I've got my guests waiting—

Q. Did the rain ruin the dinner?

The President. No, it's perfect. Listen, any time it rains in Texas, it enhances the dinner. [Laughter] Thank you all for bringing it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:18 p.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to rescued humanitarian aid workers Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry of the United States, Peter Bunch and Diana Thomas of Australia, and George Taubmann, Margrit Stebnar, Kati Jelinek, and Silke Duerrkopf of Germany.

Remarks With President Vladimir Putin of Russia and a Question-and-Answer Session With Crawford High School Students in Crawford November 15, 2001

President Bush. Thank you all. Sit down, please. Thank you all for that warm welcome. This is a great day for central Texas. It's a great day because Laura and I have had the honor of welcoming the Putins to

our beloved State. It's a great day because it's raining. [Laughter]

It's a great day, as well, because I just got off the telephone with two central Texas women: Heather Mercer, who used to live in Crawford, and Dayna Curry. They